

TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
TOWN SELECT BOARD
SPECIAL MEETING
Minutes of December 20, 2018

- I. ROLL CALL.** Select Board Chair Kenneth W. Goslant, Board members Lynn Doney (absent), Julie H. Goodrich, K. David Maxwell, and Nathaniel Miller. Also present were Town Manager Jeff Schulz, Trent Tucker (Highway Foreman), Steve Davis, and Elroy Hill.

Chair Goslant called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

- II. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (Scheduled):** None.

III. BUDGET WORK SESSION

- a. Highway Department.** Manager Schulz noted the Highway Subcommittee held a warned public meeting this morning and its members (Chair Goslant and Board member Miller) will have some recommendations for this budget based on these discussions.

In the Highway Department's operations budget, Manager Schulz noted there would be a six percent (6%) increase in full-time employee wages as this is set in the current union employee contract. In addition, \$9,450 will be put in the "Part-Time" line item to fund a part-time employee who would earn \$18 per hour and assist with winter road maintenance. Board member Maxwell noted the budget amount meant this employee would work up to five hundred and twenty-five (525) hours during the next fiscal year. Board member Goodrich suggested this position be moved to the "Contract Services" budget so this employee would not have to be paid benefits, etc. However, after some discussion, it was decided to leave the employee under "Personnel Services" since this person would be driving a municipal vehicle, subject to workers' compensation rules, etc. Board member Goodrich asked why Highway Department overtime expenses were level-funded at \$45,000 even though a reason for creating the part-time position was to limit these expenses. Manager Schulz said the Highway Subcommittee discussed this matter and ultimately decided to leave the amount as is due to the unpredictability of Vermont winters. At some time, Chair Goslant would like to revisit the possibility of outsourcing the winter maintenance of certain backroads to local contractors. However, he first would like to see how the new part-time position affects overtime expenses, etc. Manager Schulz noted health care expenses for full-time highway employees will go up in the next fiscal year because one employee switched his plan and a new employee selected family plan coverage.

Under "Contract Services," \$6,000 will be budgeted for tree removal and \$7,000 for the contracted street sweeping. Highway Foreman Trent Tucker said the street sweeping contractor was doing a good job and also charging \$50 an hour less than his competitors. As discussed earlier this year by the Select Board members, the marking of street lines, crosswalks, etc. will be outsourced in the next fiscal year. Based on a contractor's quote, the budgeted amount will be \$6,800. Board member Maxwell asked if this would include all the side streets not done in recent years. Mr. Tucker said it would. The Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) will continue to mark the center lines of Vermont Routes 12 and 12A. Manager Schulz said the "Permit Fees" line item will be \$2,600 for the next fiscal year. This budget had been \$200 or less in recent years but a couple years ago the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources (ANR) instituted a \$2,000 Stormwater Discharge Permit annual fee. Manager Schulz said the Highway Department's "Administrative" budget will remain about the same. In fact, some insurance costs will drop due to lower coverage rates.

In the "Materials/Supply" budget, Manager Schulz said the line item for purchasing road gravel and stone had been set at \$66,000 but after a lengthy discussion this morning, the Highway Subcommittee would like to suggest a different figure. Board member Miller said he would like to float setting the amount at \$200,000 for discussion purposes. He said at the previous budget meeting (12/18/18), Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission (CVRPC) analyst Dan Currier provided a presentation on the Road Surface Management System (RSMS) program indicating just under half of Northfield's forty-six (46) miles of gravel roads need resurfacing.

The estimated cost of providing these backroads with a four to six inch (4"-6") new layer of gravel/stone was over \$800,000 and it was suggested this expense could be spread out over the next few years. Board member Miller doesn't feel this outlay is feasible at this time and he suggested as an alternative putting down four inches (4") of new gravel on some of the worst backroads, which would cost about \$21,000 per mile. Even after subtracting the \$30,000 of gravel/stone set aside each year for Mud Season, Board member Miller felt the higher budget amount would allow eight (8) miles of the worst backroad to be resurfaced in the next fiscal year. He believes Northfield's highway system is an integral part of the local infrastructure and he did not want to let the unpaved roads deteriorate further without taking appropriate action. He said he is not wedded to the \$200,000 figure but would like to use it as the basis for discussion on whether the municipality considers this a priority.

There followed a discussion on whether the municipality should lease (or purchase) a road roller to assist with the compacting of road gravel on the backroads. The roller would either work with the grader during the summer or instead of the grader when the backroads were soft in late spring. Mr. Tucker estimated the cost of leasing a roller at about \$6,000 per month and it would be used for between three (3) and four (4) months each year. The vehicle itself costs about \$55,000 so it might be more cost-effective to purchase one should the rental trial period prove successful.

Manager Schulz said raising the gravel/stone line item to \$200,000 would increase the tax rate by about four cents (4¢). Board member Goodrich felt the backroads certainly need attention but felt the extra cost might be prohibitive. Board member Maxwell believes Northfield residents might accept the increase if there was a credible plan in place to address this problem. Mr. Tucker said residents also should be made aware the roadwork would not be completed in one year but would take three (3) to four (4) years. Board member Maxwell asked how realistic would it be to have the current highway crew made responsible for putting down all this gravel over the summer while still performing routine road maintenance duties. Board member Miller noted a number of their former time-consuming duties (i.e., mowing, line stripping, street sweeping, etc.) will be outsourced in the next fiscal year. Board member Maxwell didn't believe these old tasks took as much time as the proposed backroads work would. He felt it might be necessary to adjust the personnel and equipment line items to provide for additional manpower, trucks, etc. Chair Goslant thought it might be more cost-effective to lease trucks with operators than use our own crew and equipment. Board member Miller believes adjusting upwards the gravel/stone budget as he suggested would create a "philosophical precedent" for the municipality and show the Select Board members consider backroads rehabilitation a serious concern that cannot be postponed any further. Board member Maxwell asked if resurfacing the backroads is a higher priority than repaving bad roads or fixing crumbling sidewalks. Board member Miller felt all these problems should be dealt with as part of a long-term infrastructure plan.

Manager Schulz noted the draft budget proposes \$130,000 in road paving funds in the FY 2019/2020 Highway Department's Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) budget. Based on the RSMS update, the paving priorities now seem to be Union Brook Road and Cox Brook Road. It also is possible paving and sidewalk work on Slate Avenue will start this summer should ANR provide additional funds for the stormwater project there. He added it might be necessary to bond for some of the expense. Manager Schulz noted ANR will be paying for almost all of the current stormwater project near the intersection of Water Street and Union Street.

Board member Goodrich is concerned taxpayers on Town Meeting Day will ask why their backroad isn't considered a priority with all the money to be spent on gravel/stone next year. Board member Maxwell said the RSMS program uses various factors to create a priority list for road resurfacing, repaving, etc. so the Select Board members should be able to explain why some roads need to be fixed first. He also felt there should be full transparency when priority lists are developed. Board member Maxwell then noted some long-term indebtedness will be coming off the municipality's books in the next couple years so this might be a good time to start investing in infrastructure planning.

Board member Goodrich asked if there was consensus for putting the \$200,000 in the gravel/stone line item. Board member Maxwell would like it in the proposed budget for now but he will need more evidence this is the correct approach before giving his final approval.

Chair Goslant said the Highway Subcommittee members also recommend raising the line item for purchasing road salt from the current fiscal year's \$48,000 to \$60,000. In addition, they suggest raising the Chemicals/Chloride line item from \$7,000 to \$8,000 to reflect the proposed increase in gravel/stone purchasing. There were no objections. Manager Schulz noted the line item for purchasing and maintaining culverts will be reduced from \$7,500 to \$6,000. Mr. Tucker said a lot of work was done on culverts last summer and the bulk of the cost was covered by state stormwater grant funds. The budget for tires/chains will be level-funded at \$22,000.

There followed a brief discussion of the Grounds/Parks/Facilities operations budget as this department splits evenly the cost of a maintenance employee with the Highway Department. Manager Schulz said health insurance costs for this position will increase because the new maintenance person hired is on the family plan. However, \$7,500 has been removed from the contracted mowing line item as this person will take care of this. Chair Goslant said this new employee has a lot of past experience in this field and so far seems to be doing a very good job. Manager Schulz said the other expenses in this budget will remain the same.

Turning back to the Highway CIP budget, Manager Schulz said an additional \$5,000 will be added to the Building Improvements CIP account, which now has a \$107,580 balance. The CIP account for guardrail purchase and maintenance now has a \$22,566 balance and another \$1,500 will be added on July 1, 2019. Board member Maxwell asked if this was sufficient since he has seen a number of guardrails around town in bad condition. Manager Schulz feels the amount proposed will cover all the work planned for next summer.

The Bridges CIP account now has a \$148,000 balance with an additional \$35,000 to be added in the next fiscal year. He believes fixing the bridge on Stony Brook Road near the Vermont Route 12A intersection should be a priority as VTTrans already has rated its condition as "poor." Mr. Tucker estimated the repair costs at \$289,000. Manager Schulz felt this bridge would be a good candidate for state grant funds. It was noted this bridge survived the Irene flooding while the nearby Fairgrounds Road Bridge was washed away. Board member Maxwell feels this project could be put off for another year or two while the CIP account builds up and there has been an opportunity to apply for grant funds. There was no objection to this suggestion.

Manager Schulz said the Sign and Post CIP account now has a \$575 balance with an additional \$3,000 to be added in the next fiscal year. Chair Goslant said a new account should be created for the purchase of the new flashing pedestrian signs for the downtown area the Select Board members endorsed at an earlier meeting. Board member Maxwell said the estimated cost for this should be determined first. Manager Schulz said the balance of the Retaining Walls CIP account is \$35,000 with an additional \$10,000 to be added in the next fiscal year. As indicated in a recent meeting, the cost of repairing the retaining wall on Elm Street is estimated about \$320,000. Chair Goslant noted there are other retaining walls around town needing some attention.

The current balance in the Sidewalks CIP account is \$103,933 and an additional \$20,000 to be added in the next fiscal year. Manager Schulz said the priority list for sidewalk work is South Main Street, East Street, and Vine Street. Board member Maxwell agreed the sidewalk on the north side of East Street was in very bad condition. He asked if there were cost estimates for these projects. Manager Schulz said the cost of installing concrete sidewalk with granite curbing on South Main Street from the Common to the intersection with lower Central Street has been put at \$210,000. This includes \$20,000 in project contingency funds. The East Street sidewalk work, also with concrete sidewalk with granite curbing, has been estimated at about \$25,000. This would include the section of the eastside of North Main Street from Subway® to the Main Street Bridge. Board member Maxwell would like the work on East Street done as soon as possible as this area has a number of vibrant businesses that could be helped by new sidewalk.

Manager Schulz said the Vine Street sidewalk project hasn't been priced yet. Chair Goslant felt this sidewalk work, as on all side streets, should be asphalt only. As for the South Main Street sidewalk project, Board member Maxwell said there have been discussions with Norwich University (NU) over the past year about NU contributing part of the project cost. A formal request will be made soon. Manager Schulz said he will apply for another VTrans pedestrian safety grant for this project as well as for a \$25,000 grant from National Life.

Manager Schulz said the RSMS Road Program (i.e., paving) CIP account now has an \$82,000 balance with an additional \$130,084 to be added in FY 2019/2020. Another \$12,000 will be transferred from the Smith Hill Culvert CIP account as this project came in under budget. This will provide a RSMS balance of \$224,000 on July 1, 2019. Chair Goslant said the Highway Subcommittee will provide its recommendation at a later time on how best to use these funds. Further discussion also might lead to increasing the proposed \$130,084 amount.

In the Highway Department Capital Equipment Plan (CEP) budget, Chair Goslant feels the main topic of discussion tonight should be whether to reduce the expected service life of the two (2) Western Star Tandem Dump trucks from the current twelve (12) years. The lifespans of these vehicles originally was set at ten (10) years but then increased, which he felt was wrong. Chair Goslant believes such vehicles break down quickly after seven (7) years of heavy use. This results in trade-in or resale values dropping sharply and repair costs becoming far too expensive. Mr. Tucker noted most extended warranties expire after seven (7) years and due to the sensitive electronics in these vehicles, most extensive repairs have to be done in the dealership. Board member Maxwell would like hard numbers regarding suggested higher resale values and reduced maintenance costs before agreeing to reduce the service life of these vehicles by twenty-five percent (25%). Mr. Tucker will provide some recent quotes on potential trade-in and/or resale values of the current dump trucks, which have been in service for less than five (5) years. Elroy Hill noted when a transmission goes out on one of these vehicles after the warranty expires, you're looking at a \$20,000 repair bill. Chair Goslant added the vehicle would be off the roads for at least a couple weeks.

Manager Schulz noted the 2009 International Dump Truck is scheduled for replacement in FY 2020/2021 and Mr. Tucker recommends replacing it with a less expensive Lo Pro truck for about \$145,000. He would like the old dump truck retained as a spare vehicle as it could help with leaf picking, snow removal, etc. Mr. Tucker said the vehicle lift in the Town Garage is in very poor condition and very likely will need to be replaced long before its scheduled replacement date of FY 2040/2041. He felt it had a couple years of service left at most. Manager Schulz noted the vehicle lift was purchased in 2011 and was expected to last thirty (30) years. Before additional replacement funds are set aside, he would like it inspected and any needed repairs done. Board member Maxwell felt any employee safety concerns should be addressed right away.

IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (Unscheduled). There was none.

V. ADJOURNMENT. Motion by Board member Maxwell, seconded by Board member Goodrich, to adjourn. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

The Board adjourned at 8:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kenneth L. McCann

Kenneth L. McCann, Acting Clerk

An audio recording of this meeting is available in the Town Manager's Office.

These minutes were approved at the regular Select Board meeting of January 8, 2019.